

A Woman of Sense

by algyy

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Summary: Constance Hardbroom and Imogen Drill head to the coast for a week of sun, sand, sea...and squabbles.

1. Chapter 1

****_Constance Hardbroom:_****

It is not often that I behave in a way which could be considered even mildly eccentric, let alone out and out mad. I am, generally speaking, a woman of sense.

On this occasion, however, I believe I may actually have taken leave of my senses.

It is the last day of term; by some miracle, the academy is still standing, and furthermore is on its way towards being blissfully empty. Any other time, I would be readying myself for a peaceful holiday, alone, content, in control, and with plenty of books to read. Nothing could be better for a woman like me.

But on this occasion, it is, alas, not to be - on account of the aforementioned leave-taking of my senses.

Because on this occasion, I am going on holiday. To Cornwall. With my most esteemed - my pen drips sarcasm - my most esteemed colleague, one Miss Drill.

It has come about by accident, I suppose one could say, though I am not typically the sort of woman who has accidents. It was originally to be a holiday for all the teachers - an insane proposition, as I did not hesitate to inform them all, several times - but then it turned out (how convenient) that the others all had other commitments, and now it is just me.

And her.

I have packed, and I am ready. I have clothes, toiletries, and plenty of books. On the top of my suitcase is a recently published treatise by a prestigious witchcraft authority; the subject, the essential incompatibility of witchcraft and a love of nature. I know that it will annoy her if she sees it - she is always prating of the wonderfulness of nature - and I intend to place it somewhere where she definitely will see it.

And why do I care so much for annoying her? Perhaps it is because she annoys me. It's bad enough that she is not a witch, but on top of that, she is too...too what? Too perky, too friendly, too eminently reasonable, too smiley, too blonde, too pretty - yes, pretty; she must be, for I have seen how every man who has ever visited the academy looks at her. She encourages them. I give her ten minutes, if that, this week, before she falls prey to the inane charms of some immature young man. It will be the camping trip all over again. I can still see them now, stealthily holding hands by the campfire, talking and giggling away together like a couple of love-struck adolescents. Whatever happened to that fellow, I wonder. Dare I hope it was something unpleasant?

"Ah!" She bursts into the room, all enthusiasm and casual clothing. "You're ready! Are you?"

"Yes, Miss Drill, I am ready. Aren't you?"

"I...well..." She's flustered; I feel a flicker of satisfaction. "Almost! I'm almost ready! Just hang on a minute..."

I watch coolly as she dashes hectically from the room; time elapses, and she dashes back in, carrying bags and looking flushed.

"Right, I'm ready." She says it with an air of immense satisfaction, as if she has overcome terrible odds and achieved the nigh-on impossible. She looks me up and down. "Dare I hope you are going to remove your hat?"

"It is this, Miss Drill, or the bonnet. The choice is yours."

She sighs. "You are leaving your broomstick behind at least, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes." I'm not, of course; I have turned it temporarily into an umbrella, but she doesn't need to know that. A witch does not leave her broomstick at home, or her hat. It's simply not done. She would know that, if she weren't such a silly, clueless, normal sort.

"Well, then." Her look is strangely challenging, but nothing compared to the sort of glare I can summon when I choose. "Shall we go?"

I nod coolly. "As you wish."

And so, the holiday begins - much good may it do either of us.

****Imogen Drill:****

I have never seen Constance Hardbroom in a car before. I wonder if

she's ever been in a car before. She sits bolt upright (of course she does) in the passenger seat of the car I've hired for the week, and regards the motorway with the sort of cool, unflinching gaze which she normally reserves for misbehaving first-years. At least she's taken her hat off, if only because it wouldn't fit in under the roof. I'm sure she won't hesitate to put it back on again as soon as we stop anywhere.

We drive in silence - quite a stony silence, in her case. I strongly suspect that when we do talk to each other, it will only be to argue.

And yet, I feel oddly happy, happy to be here with her, happy at the prospect of a week in her company, even if we will do nothing but squabble during it.

I may as well be honest. I have...how can I put it?...a bit of a thing for her. A crush sort of thing. Maybe even a love sort of thing. Who wouldn't, if they knew her? I couldn't tell you how it started; it feels as if it's been there forever, a little corner of my heart reserved just for her.

Oh, of course I've tried to deny it; I know nothing could ever come of it. Quite apart from anything else, I'm convinced she absolutely hates me. I don't always like her. She drives me mad.

Would I find her so annoying if I didn't love her?

I must be out of my mind going on holiday with her - yet I can't deny that my heart leapt when I realised it was going to be just the two of us. Why? It's not as if anything could ever happen. She's Constance Hardbroom; I'm me; never shall the twain meet, except maybe to exchange harsh words.

"I thought we might stop off and have lunch in a pub on the way," I break the silence to say.

She looks at me askance, as if I have suggested we stop off at a cheap hotel and book a room for an hour. Shut up, brain.

"I do not frequent that sort of establishment."

I sigh. "It's not a...den of iniquity. It's only like a restaurant. We've got to have lunch somewhere."

She gives me the look she usually reserves for particularly idiotic students. "Very well, then. It is your holiday as well. Carry on, Miss Drill - to the pub!"

Well, that's not something I ever thought I'd hear Constance Hardbroom say.

2. Chapter 2

****_Author's Note:** Thank you for the reviews for Chapter 1! I've been reading some of the other fanfics on here and I've got to say, there are a lot of talented people here with some very inventive ideas for the cast of Cackle's Academy. Lots of fun to read! Okay, then, on with Chapter 2, in which HB discovers coast paths and wishes she

hadn't._**

Constance Hardbroom:

Our holiday is proving torturous, much as expected. We partake of lunch in a ghastly location filled to bursting with crowds of the normal, who all gawp quite unnecessarily at me (Miss Drill at length requests me to remove my hat). They chat and laugh at unnecessary volumes, and fiddle with small electronic devices in a way that makes my fingers itch.

But the ordeal is survived, and we set forth once more. For all her much-vaunted map-reading skills, Miss Drill very soon gets lost, and it is a long and tiresome journey to the coast; many a landmark is passed more than once. Our accommodation for the week is a small cottage in the midst of an equally small village. Miss Drill exclaims that it is all pleasant and quaint, and isn't the view wonderful? I would of course never admit to such a weakness, but I think I am rather missing home.

Then, for reasons no doubt known only to herself, she insists on taking me out for a walk. Thus the evening finds me perched precariously on a preposterously windswept coast path, Miss Drill twittering inanely about the joys of nature and exercise at my side. The path is narrow, and unreasonably steep; I should not like to admit it, but I am actually, at this precise moment, stuck.

In my defence, witches are not designed to walk along coast paths. We have broomsticks; we do not walk.

I shan't tell her I am stuck, of course. I am sure I will be able to get down in a moment.

She, of course, is as fleet-footed as a mountain goat, her trainer-clad feet springing nimbly over the uneven path. She is not even out of breath, though she has paused to admire the view. The brisk sea air has coloured her cheeks a delicate pink; her short hair is ruffled by the wind. She is looking pretty again. She does that far too often. At least there are no men around to be ensnared by her.

For goodness' sake. How am I ever going to get down off this rock without breaking my neck?

"Constance! Are you stuck?" she calls, all irritating perkiness and prettiness.

"No, of course not. I am merely...admiring the view." A foolish lie; she knows I'm not the sort to admire views. I told her so not ten minutes ago.

The corners of her mouth twitch. "You're stuck, aren't you?"

In a moment I shall vanish. It will serve her right.

"I told you to wear walking boots." She bounces back up the path towards me, all agility and jogging bottoms.

"These are my walking boots." Well. I walk in them usually, and they serve me very well. But then, Cackle's Academy is hardly rough

terrain.

She offers me her hand, the impertinent woman.

"Put your right foot down here," she says, tapping a nearby stone with her own foot, as if I were some physically incompetent first-year.

"No, thank you, Miss Drill, I am quite happy here."

She is struggling not to laugh. I do not take kindly to being laughed at. "You can't stay on a coast path forever."

I fold my hands, a preliminary to disappearing. She realises what I am about to do, and grabs my arm. I glare at her, of course, but she remains attached.

"Don't be so defeatist," she says.

Oh, defeatist, am I? If only she knew...! The clueless, impertinent, magicless little...

I take her hand in a vicelike grip, and step down onto the path. The movement is hardly graceful, but at least it is made.

"Come along, then," I say, "To Trebarwith Strand, is it, that we're headed? Lead on!"

"I knew you wouldn't be able to resist a challenge," she says, with an impertinent grin. Then away she trots, so carelessly confident, showing off no doubt; and I, a prisoner of my own pride, shuffle slowly along behind.

Imogen Drill:

She touched my hand, she touched my hand...more than that, she gripped it and nearly broke my fingers. I will treasure the moment, painful as it was, forever.

I walk quickly to disguise my reaction, almost leaving her behind. My heart is pounding frantically; I feel like a schoolgirl who has been given a smile by her crush.

I don't know how she makes it to Trebarwith Strand and back in those boots; I suspect her of using magic now and then, when my back is turned. Much to my disappointment, she doesn't have any need to take my hand again.

3. Chapter 3

Imogen Drill

"Miss Drill, I was here first. The bathroom is mine."

"The only reason you're here first is because you barged me out of your way. Let me go first. I won't take long."

"Certainly not. You will take forever, primping and preening like you do..."

"I don't primp! Or preen!"

"Well, lifting weights, admiring your own muscles, whatever it is you do in there."

"Well, I'm not waiting for you to wash all that hair!"

"Miss Drill, I will ask you one more time. Remove yourself from the bathroom door."

"No, I won't."

The holiday is taking its toll on us, I admit, and it's only the first full day. But it's a dismal, grey day, pouring relentlessly with rain; she hasn't forgiven me for making her walk a coast path last night; and there is only one bathroom. Which is currently proving something of a bone of contention.

"Miss Drill, if you don't get out of my way, I will have no choice but to turn you into a toad."

"You can't do that! What about the Witches' Code?"

"It would be only temporary, and no one would know."

"I'd know! And if you think you can just intimidate..." I turn to open the bathroom door and dash inside; suddenly, she vanishes. The next thing I know, the bathroom door slams shut on me; I hear the sound of the bolt being pushed across, followed by running water.

"Constance! Constance, that's not fair!"

"Life isn't fair, Miss Drill."

I am forced to admit defeat. At least I'm not a toad. I slump down on a nearby stool to wait my turn.

Constance Hardbroom

I am sat at the dining-room table sipping a cup of tea and looking out at the rain - I dare to hope that such weather will dampen her ardour for coast path walking, but one never knows with her - when a piercing shriek rents the air. I can hardly refrain from rolling my eyes.

"What now?" I call.

"What have you done to the water, Constance?" she hollers back.

"I haven't done anything to the water, Miss Drill. Why on earth would I want to do things to water?"

There is silence for a moment, then she says, "Oh, I realise what's happened. It's an electric shower. Constance! Can you put a pound in the meter?"

"Can I put a what where?"

"A pound, Constance, a pound coin! Put it in the meter! It's in the hallway!"

Does she think I am her personal slave?

"Do it yourself," I respond.

"Constance, I can't. I've got nothing on except a headful of shampoo!"

I stroll at a leisurely pace into the hallway. "Where is it?"

"In one of the cupboards - near the door. Are there any pound coins there?"

"I can't see any." I confess I am not looking very hard. An electric meter, indeed! I haven't used electricity for years.

"You'll have to get one out of my purse. It's in the kitchen, by the kettle. Or did I put it in the dining-room? Oh..." There is the sound of irate footfalls on the stairs, and she hoves into view clad only in a towel of frankly insufficient size to cover her expanses of tanned limbs. There is a mass of froth on her head. She leaves wet footprints behind her as she pads out to the kitchen, recoiling visibly from the chill of the tiled floor. I realise I am staring at her legs, and quickly look away. I am not entirely sure why I am blushing.

Her towel slips as she fiddles with the electric meter, and she just manages to catch it. For some reason, my face is on fire and my heart is pounding. I wonder why. No doubt it is caused by annoyance.

I leave her to her electric meter, and return to my cup of tea.

End
file.